

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 13, 2001

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On December 23, 1999, in a widely reported and heralded event, Freddie Meeks of Los Angeles received a presidential pardon that was internationally viewed as righting a very old wrong. Mr. Meeks is one of the few surviving black sailors convicted by the Navy of mutiny following the catastrophic explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in California in 1944. As Members of Congress who have long supported justice for the Port Chicago sailors, we are grateful to the Navy, the FBI, the Pardon Attorney, the Department of Justice, and all those who played a role in considering Mr. Meeks' appeal and securing the well-justified pardon.

Now, we respectfully ask you, based on the substantial evidence about the case developed in conjunction with the Meeks appeal, to use your presidential power to issue pardons or other appropriate Executive clemency to the remaining 49 sailors who should never have been tried for or convicted of mutiny in the first place.

Such an action would help bring closure to the many members of the families of men who have passed away and to many more -- including the relatives and descendants of those who perished at Port Chicago -- who have come to see the elderly sailor's burden as an important cause. The very extensive editorial, press and media coverage (including a feature film and two cable documentaries) of the Meeks case and the Port Chicago story in general, the active support of veterans and civil rights groups, and the broad bipartisan support demonstrated by a unanimous vote of the California Legislature in 1999, illustrates the popularity with which your Executive action would be greeted.

Even more importantly, it would establish for the historical record the inappropriateness of the prosecutions themselves for such an extreme and unsubstantiated charge as mutiny. For these men to carry the stigma of such a conviction, given the historical facts of the Port Chicago case, is a disgrace and can only be corrected by your action as President.

As all those who have reviewed the case now recognize, racism was a pervasive and humiliating feature of life at Port Chicago. Black sailors were not only exclusively assigned to the loading of munitions subject to the orders of white officers, but were also housed, fed and drilled separately: they were not even permitted to use the same restroom facilities. Black sailors were given no training in the handling of the munitions, were not given any equipment (such as gloves), were misinformed about the nature of the hazards of the weapons, and were denied the compassionate leave provided to white officers after the explosion that killed 320 of their fellow Navy men.

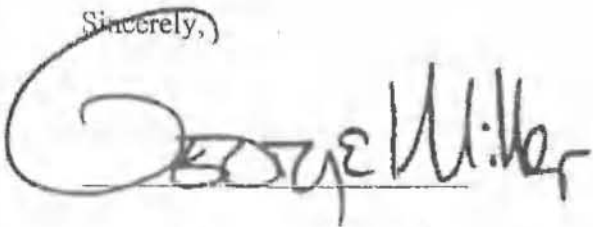
Nevertheless, most of those who were ultimately convicted by the court martial played a key role in the gruesome tasks of collecting body parts for which they earned commendations. Ultimately, the 50 sailors were individually convicted of mutiny – the most serious military offense possible – by judges who considered their fate in less than an hour and a half despite months of evidence and cross-examination. Pleas for leniency and reviews of the convictions from President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Thurgood Marshall and others were ignored.

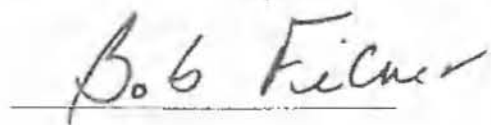
Mr. Meeks' pardon in 1999 was a very important step in establishing a more balanced and compassionate historical view of the Port Chicago story. But most of those who were improperly charged with mutiny are no longer alive to request a pardon. Many, in fact, were so ashamed of their wrongful prosecution and imprisonment that they died without ever disclosing their past conviction, even to their closest family members.

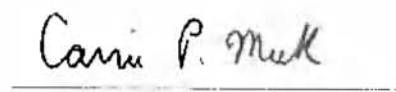
The extensive research developed by the law firm of Morrison and Foerster as well as by the Navy, the FBI, and the Office of the Pardon Attorney and the Department of Justice in conjunction with the Meeks case provides invaluable evidence that such an action on your part is warranted. We would be delighted to provide your Counsel's office with these and other supporting materials.

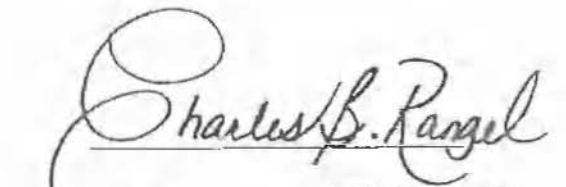
We appreciate your consideration of our request, and we would be pleased to work with you and the White House staff to help achieve our goal of a Presidential pardon or other appropriate act of clemency for the Port Chicago 50.

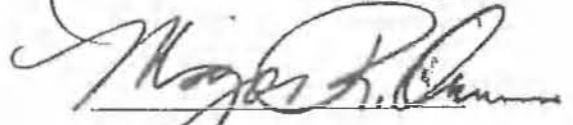
Sincerely,

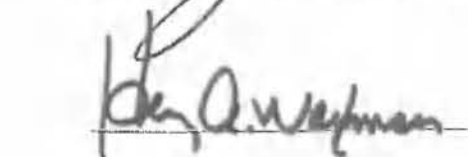












Pat Stark

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Robert W. G. G.

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Loretta Sanchez

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Gott, C. Rust

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